MUSI 528 901 – EARLY OPERA, SPRING 2021
Tuesday & Thursday, 11:20am - 12:40pm
instructor: Gregory Barnett (gbarnett@rice.edu)

This seminar focuses on roughly the first 125 years of opera history by examining selected works from Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (1607) through Georg Frideric Handel's *Poro, rè dell'Indie* (1731). We will study each opera in a module on Canvas in which you will find reading and listening/viewing assignments with accompanying scores and librettos.

The broader topics include the aesthetics of the so-called *dramma per musica* and the social circumstances that impinged upon them; the technology of stagecraft as it evolved over the seventeeth century; literary sources and their adaptation for the musical stage; and singers, voice types, and the emerging *bel canto* tradition.

Throughout, we will analyze the design of the operas (e.g., the function of recitatives, arias, and choruses; the techniques of musical characterization; and the dramatic principles that underlie longer-range musical planning) because the question of how to tell a story in music is never settled in this new and ever-evolving genre.

## READINGS AND RECORDINGS

All readings and recordings will be made available on Canvas within the sequence of topics listed below.

## ATTENDANCE

All classes will be conducted online via Zoom. Attendance and participation are required, and will count for 25% of your course grade. If you need to be late or miss class, ask to be excused. The rules for online attendance are as follows:

1. enter the Zoom meeting by 11:20am. Lateness will negatively affect your attendance grade.
2. Have your camera on throughout the entire class (including during screen sharing). If I cannot see you then you are absent.
3. Reading and listening assignments are made a week before we discuss them in class. Be prepared to discuss the questions that I have posed.
4. If you foresee any problems involving equipment, connectivity, or logistics, let me know as soon as possible so we can work out a solution.

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

There will be three written essay assignments of 1,000-1,200 words that will comprise your response to a specific operatic question or problem posed – for example, the character of Seneca and the message of Monteverdi's *Poppea* in seventeenth-century Venice; or *Dido and Aeneas* as English court allegory; or *opera seria* dramaturgy and its political agenda. These are intended

both as your response to arguments you have read in your class assignments, and as your own interpretation of a given opera and its historical context.

Your essays will be submitted through Canvas by midnight on the date they are due. Requests for extensions must be made before the due date.

Essay Nº 1, due Thursday, February 18
Essay Nº 2, due Thursday, March 25
Essay Nº 3, due Thursday, April 29

GRADING

Each of the essays will count for 25% of the course grade. For the first two essays, the first version will count for half of the grade and the revision will count for the other half. The grade for the revision will not be based on the overall quality of the essay, but on the extent to which the student has successfully revised the first version. The remaining 25% of the course grade will be based on attendance.

MODULES

The course will be arranged in a series of modules. Each module will include links to one or more readings, scores, recordings, and videos. It will also include discussion questions for the assigned material. The sequence of topics is as follows:

Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (1607)

*Ulisse* & *Poppea*

Venetian opera: Cavalli's *La Calisto* (1651) and Sartori's *Orfeo* (1672)

Singers of Italian opera

The *tragédie en musique*: Lully's *Armide* (1686)

English opera and semi-opera

*Opera seria*

DISABILITIES

Rice University is committed to equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities. In keeping with the university's mission to provide an unsurpassed education, Disability Support Services (DSS) provides accommodations and support services to students with disabilities.

Please contact me if you have a documented disability that may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Any such discussion will be strictly confidential.

If you have a disability but are not registered with DSS, I can help you with this, or you may contact DSS directly. The DSS office is located in the Allen Center, Room 111—telephone: (713) 348-5841; fax: (713) 348-5888; e-mail: adarice@rice.edu. Further information may be obtained at **http://dss.rice.edu/**.